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SUBJECT: CHAD: VOICES OF THE RULING PARTY

REF: NDJAMENA 400

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Secretary General of the ruling party acknowledges rot in the party and an up-hill battle to stimulate popular interest in the coming election. The Governor of Kanem, a former rebel, dismisses the political opposition as ineffective and looks toward an ill-defined "politico-military" solution. An oppositionist allied with ruling party notes that the government has perfected the art of falsifying elections and thinks a rebel attack could make the election interesting. Meanwhile, the opposition coalition CPDC has officially announced its boycott of the election. End Summary.

THE PARTY MAN

¶2. (SBU) Poloff called on Mahamat Hissene, Secretary General of the MPS (Mouvement Patriotique du Salut), March 14 to get the party perspective on the May 3 presidential election. An "Arab" (i.e., member of ethnicity that speaks Arabic as its native tongue) from the Batha Region (centered around Oum Hadjer, Ati, and Yao) and former editor of the MPS newspaper Le Progres, Mahamat Hissene just emerged from a heated contest in the MPS third extraordinary congress with his position surprisingly intact (reftel). He acknowledged that the referendum last June that had altered the constitution to allow President Deby to run for a third term had seen a "very low turnout." He admitted that there was a prospect of a repeat of that phenomenon in the coming election if the party did not pull itself together.

¶3. (SBU) Mahamat Hissene said that he had given a tough speech at the congress, blasting the party's complacency, cronyism, and corruption. (Embassy has acquired a copy of the speech and confirms that Mahamat Hissene was energetic in its criticism of the party "militants" who had ceased being militant and simply expected to be rewarded.) Mahamat Hissene said that the easier days of the 1990's when Deby had come to power and the party was new were long over. The MPS was now tarred with the government for economic failure; such was the price to be paid for being the dominant party. The export of oil, he said, had increased popular expectations,

causing strikes and discontent in reaction to the government's continued failure to pay salaries and pensions, and nothing the government or the party had done had gone far to tamp down these unrealistic expectations. In the not-too-distant future when more roads were built, farm goods began coming to market much faster, and people began to feel some benefit to their own livelihoods, the pressure on the government and party would begin to ease. He excused the present contretemps with the World Bank on the ground that the government was desperate for funds immediately, a need that should, he said, have been understood by everyone. He complained that one of his worst headaches, as party executive officer, was sorting through ethnic complexities, as he had to weigh the ethnic dimension carefully with every appointment he made.

¶4. (SBU) Predictably, Mahamat Hissene was not forthcoming when poloff, as politely as possible, suggested that changing the constitution had not served the democratic need for regular transition of power. He limply shifted blame to the opposition, claiming that in the 1993 national conference it was the opposition that had insisted on the term limit being among the constitutional provisions that could be subject to amendment (because, he said, they hoped to come to power themselves some day). He acknowledged that lists of registered voters were inadequate (as opposed to simply fictive, as claimed by the opposition) but blamed this shortcoming on the vastness and poverty of the country. The present effort to improve the lists was focused in rural areas that had previously simply been left out.

FORMER REBEL, NOW GOVERNOR

¶5. (SBU) Ahmadou Ahidjo, Governor of the Kanem Region (Mao and Moussoro, northeast of Lake Chad), called on Ambassador Wall March 14. A Southern military officer who defected in the 1990's to join a rebel movement centered in the far North and then was accepted back into the fold by Deby, Ahidjo characterized the present political juncture in Chad as fluid and unpredictable. Some of the pillars of the Zaghawa clique that had run the country (into the ground) had gone into rebellion and posed a significant threat from outside, just at the time that Deby was putting himself up for reelection. But none of the opposition figures who had any name recognition, Ahidjo said, were in a position to capitalize on Deby's present weakness. They commanded no significant resources, had compromised themselves by working with the government through the years, and refused to work together effectively. Ahidjo was pointedly unkind in his description of the leading Kanembou opposition figure, Lol Mahamat Choua, saying Lol no longer had much following even in Kanem itself. (He added, however, that the populace of Kanem Region was now majority Gorane, i.e., far northern, as the Kanembou had gradually been replaced by Gorane in their own territory.)

¶6. (SBU) Ahidjo claimed that the only way out of the present impasse was, to use a favorite Chadian expression, "politico-military." He did not elaborate nor suggest what role he personally intended to play, but the implication was a coup on the Turkish model.

QUASI PARTY ALLY

¶7. (SBU) To round out the picture further, poloff also called on Dr. Delwa Kassire Koumakoye March 14. Kassire comes from the Tandjile Region (Lai) in southern Chad and heads the Vive-RNDP, a party that has been around for many years, sometimes more in opposition, sometimes -- as at present -- officially allied with the ruling party. Kassire described his "alliance" with the MPS as being loose. It allowed a couple of his colleagues to hold secretary-general positions in two ministries, although he himself "would never" serve in the government. He said he was "tempted" to run against Deby in the coming election, since it was likely

that the rebels would make a push in the lead-up to the election and, in the ensuing confusion, it might be the moment for someone like himself to take advantage. However, Kassire observed, the greater likelihood, as was the pattern in Africa, was that someone brought to power through force of arms would have to be removed and replaced through force of arms. The issue was not one of popularity; the great majority of the population, Kassire said, was dead-set against Deby, although every region of the country had different reasons (read, ethnic viewpoint) for being against him.

18. (SBU) The problem was, Kassire said, that he was not sure he commanded adequate resources to make a run. (Comment: The dilapidated condition of his party headquarters, a sweltering dust-blown shack whose walls were being chewed by rats throughout the discussion, gave testimony to his party's lack of resources. End Comment) e boasted of being well-known and liked throughout the country, but name-recognition, he said, was not enough. A particularly expensive requirement was to be able to place observers at the voting booths throughout the country. The government found it difficult to get away with tampering with voting results in the cities, but in the vast countryside, fraud was rampant. Asked whether he had given consideration to joining the opposition coalition CPDC, Kassire condemned all the other opposition leaders as selfish frauds.

OFFICIAL BOYCOTT

19. (SBU) On March 15 Salibou Garba, secretary of the opposition coalition CPDC, stopped by the Embassy to drop off a communique unanimously agreed upon March 14 by the members of the CPDC, providing the coalition's staunch refusal to participate in the May 3 election. He also passed a copy of a letter from the CPDC to the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program, to the same effect. Garba said the CPDC was most unhappy with "all of the international community" who, he said, appeared to have "abandoned the people of Chad." He related what he had heard about an abortive coup attempt overnight and asked how it was possible to imagine going forward with an election under such unsettled circumstances. To poloff's question whether the CPDC meeting had decided on a specific plan for handling the election, beyond boycott, Garba said he did not wish to reveal any plan but it was certain that the parties in the CPDC would do all in their power to ensure there was no election. Asked about Kassire, Garba dismissed him as a lying chameleon who would run if Deby gave him the money to run.

WALL